

150 acres on Montalto placed under conservation easement

THE THOMAS Jefferson Foundation has signed an agreement with the Piedmont Environmental Council to preserve as open space in perpetuity 150 acres on Montalto, the neighboring mountain that rises 400 feet above Monticello.

The deed of conservation easement strictly limits what improvements can be made and what activities can take place on the acreage, which is on the north and northeast sides of the 1,278-foot-high peak.

The Foundation ceded its development rights on the property to the PEC in exchange for \$1.5 million, which it will use to reduce the debt incurred for its purchase of 330 acres on Montalto for \$15 million in 2004.

Monticello has now placed approximately 1,400 of the 2,500 acres it owns under protective easements.

“We are extremely pleased to enter into this agreement with the Piedmont Environmental Council,” said TJF President Daniel P. Jordan. “Stewardship of the land is a Jeffersonian concept, and it is our privilege to ensure that this highly visible parcel of land will be protected for all time and that Montalto will remain a



A view of Montalto from the Saunders Bridge entrance to Monticello.

TJF

scenic view for Monticello’s patrons as well as for residents of and visitors to this area.”

The Piedmont Environmental Council, based in Warrenton, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and protecting the rural economy, natural resources, history, and beauty of the Piedmont. The PEC has worked with landowners mountain. The foundation has begun the process of obtaining zoning approval from Albemarle County to pursue these purposes.

Jefferson purchased 574 acres of Montalto, “as much of his nearest mountain as can be seen from mine, and 100 yards beyond the line of sight,” from Edward Carter in 1777 for 190 pounds. Jefferson wrote of harvesting timber from the “high mountain” for building materials, firewood, and charcoal, but it is unclear how much of the mountain was forested during his lifetime.

Jefferson envisioned that the north side of Monticello and all of Montalto would be converted into extensive “park and riding grounds.” The two properties would be connected by a bridge traversing

“Thoroughfare Gap” between the “upper and lower park grounds,” allowing traffic on this public road to flow unimpeded. Jefferson also designed a series of lookout towers for the top of Montalto, each exhibiting a creative architectural motif. None of these were built.

Following Jefferson’s death, Montalto was sold by his daughter Martha Jefferson Randolph in 1832. The property had numerous owners over the decades, reflected by the various names bestowed upon this conspicuous Albemarle County landmark: Repose, Patterson Mountain, Carter Ridge Farm, Brown’s Mountain,

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Thomas Jefferson
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and Mountaintop Farm. The slopes were used as pastureland for more than 100 years, and many of the buildings on the property were originally constructed for agricultural purposes.

The Thomas Jefferson Foundation's 2004 purchase of Montalto rescued the property from potential real estate development that could have severely compromised the Monticello viewshed. Coincidentally, the purchase price of \$15 million was the same amount President Jefferson authorized for the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.